



On the morning of September 10, I woke up to a rather unique circumstance—a crossroads of sorts in the life of a Cleveland sports fan. First of all, I was in Edinburgh, Scotland. That's different enough. But more importantly, the Browns had played their season opener the day before, and to my own astonishment, I had absolutely no idea what the outcome had been. ...Well, I mean, I certainly had my presumptions (the Brownies are a reliable 1-13 in openers since their return, after all). But thanks to a 3,000 mile oceanic divide, shoddy hotel WIFI, and the notably enjoyable absence of ESPN, I found myself uninformed to a degree I hadn't experienced since toddlerdom. "What had the Browns done?! What had I missed?!"

What happened next signified a mildly unnerving change of perspective that continues to resonate even as I settle back into my day-to-day, Midwestern American, sports watchin' routine. Sometimes—it turns out—there really are better ways to spend a Sunday. Sometimes, it's healthier to just read about what happened and be grateful you were off doing something else.

Now before this starts sounding like a cynic's manifesto—or worse yet a white flag response to one of the worst Cleveland sports years ever (which is REALLY saying something!)—I should note that I have watched the past two Browns games in their entirety. And at times, I even found them pretty entertaining. That is what sports are supposed to be about, anyway, right? Entertainment; enjoying yourself. Sure, maniacal loyalty and alcoholism and gambling are right up there, too. But if the *Family Feud* host asked you to "name a reason why people watch professional sports," odds are good you could hit that buzzer, shout "To Have Fun!", and the survey would respond with a corresponding BAM for your #1 answer.

As any true Cleveland sports fan knows, however, the rules are slightly different for us. Over time, watching our teams has devolved into something far beyond an enjoyable distraction. As much as we still look forward to the game every Sunday, the actual process of watching it has become more akin to a task, a chore, a burden, an inescapable responsibility. Every Sunday we

clock into the factory and do our time, pushing toward a day when we can finally get out of this racket and start living the dream.



Over in Scotland, they have a figure of speech for an unending, unrewarding task like this. They call it “painting the Forth Bridge,” because as the story goes, it took so long to put a coat of paint on east Scotland’s massive rail bridge, that by the time workers finished the job, it was time to start all over again.

Coincidentally, I was standing in front of the actual Forth Bridge on Sunday, September 9, as the Browns were getting ready to face the Philadelphia Eagles. Back in Cleveland, the media buzz was essentially the same as it's been every other year-- all about how this 2012 season is “the most important since the franchise’s return,” and “the beginning of a new era.” You know, cuz of how young and inspired the team is (which has always just been code for not having any actual proven talent).

What I saw when I finally read the recap of the Browns-Eagles game the next morning, however, was a very old, recycled script—one as predictable as Dr. House identifying the correct obscure disease at the end of every episode. First, we had the part where the young, upstart quarterback looks completely overwhelmed and out of his element (though I must admit I liked the whole “getting stuck under the flag” routine—brilliant stuff!). Then we had the part where the running game gets reduced to a cluttered stumble for stray inches. And the indelible image of a clueless coach furrowing his brow in confusion—the way a dog looks when you try to explain to him why eating his own poo is unbecoming. Last but not least, of course, there’s the scoreboard indicating that-- despite all these things-- Cleveland could still win this game. A bounce here, a bounce there, and here we are, hanging around until the very end—squeezing the last bits of hope from your heart and good sense from your brain.

